TWEE
Camera Obscura
The Lucksmiths
Teenage Fanclub
Amelia Fletcher
Sarah Records
Issue 06 July 2009
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Hello,

And welcome to issue 06 of the Twee fanzine! It's a special one, because it marks the second birthday of the Twee as Fuck club as well as the very first birthday of the Twee fanzine, and we've got some truly exciting stuff for you to mark the occasion. First, a slightly bitter-sweet offering of one of the last ever Lucksmiths interviews, before they part their ways forever (sniff!), but also some wonderful chats with Twee legends Amelia Fletcher, Matt and Clare of Sarah Records fame, the admirable Gerard Love from Teenage Fanclub, our long-time favourites Camera Obscura and more recent 'lectrotwee crush Hong Kong In The 60s. And we welcome aboard a new member of the Twee team - Anastasia who has also provided us with her delicious (and vegan!) Margarita cupcake recipe. Enjoy!

Lots of love TAF xxx
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Visit www.tweeasfuck.com for an extended colour version of the fanzine.

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Hong Kong In The 60s

Hong Kong in the 60s play the kind of electronic dreamy pop that makes TWEE AS FUCK go weak at the knees. After two outstanding live performances at the club, we thought it high time to sit them down and find out more about synths, fans in high places and making friends at Library School....

Words: Elaine Tierney
Photos: Timm Scullion

TAF: Introduce yrselves!

Tim: I'm in charge of obsessive electronic fiddling and the hoarding of analogue keyboards. I'm also the source of mindless optimism in the band.
Mei Yau: I provide the voice, as well as fingers small enough to play the Casio VL-Tone.
Chris: I am the band's wellspring of grumbling misery and chronic physical ailments.

TAF: Long band names are either really terrible, or great. Hong Kong in the 60s definitely falls into the latter. What was the thinking behind the name?

C: We wanted a band name that conveyed the vibe of Hong Kong in the 60s - or at least the vibe you get from watching *In The Mood For Love* or listening to 60s Chinese music - but we couldn't come up with anything else.
T: Yes, I remember we spent a whole night with a big bag of sweets just agonising over the name. We probably said the phrase 'Hong Kong in the 60s' about twenty times before realising that it could be a band name in its own right.

TAF: When you met was it an instant meeting of minds?

C: Tim and Mei Yau met in 6th form and instantly bonded over being the only two interesting people in Newbury. Mei Yau and I met years later while both working as library trainees in Oxford – we took a good 9 months to exchange anything more than a passing "hello".
MY: I remember I gave Chris a lift once but we spent the whole time talking about library school.
T: Lacking as they do even the most basic social skills, the development of Chris and Mei Yau's friendship was sluggish at best.

TAF: I hear lots of late Stereolab and the High Llamas in yr music, but is there anything else we should be listening out for in there?

T: Jim O'Rourke's use of the shaker egg is a big influence on my production.
C: My other main musical obsessions are 60s and 70s Brazilian pop artists like João Donato and Edu Lobo, and classic Italian soundtrack composers such as Ennio Morricone and Piero Umiliani. Personally, I imagine that most people listening to our music would be surprised to learn that I own almost every Manowar album, though I doubt that this has influenced our music much.

TAF: Sean O'Hagan is a big fan of yrs. That must be pretty awesome...

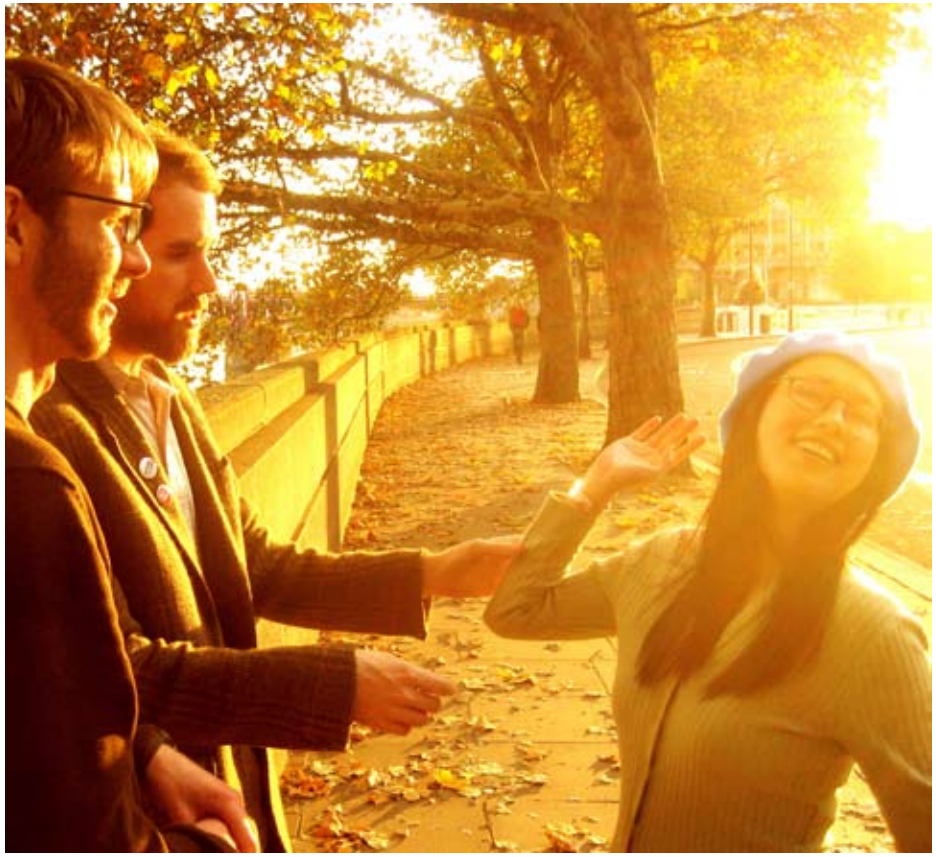
C: He is definitely one of our heroes, so when he complimented us on our music - and even attended one of our gigs - we were quite overwhelmed. On meeting him, we were also pleased to find out that he is as nice in person as his lovely music would suggest.
MY: He's such an enthusiastic and friendly guy. Every time I've seen him at High Llamas gigs he's recommended a whole raft of musicians and records for me to check out.
T: Sean is one of the greatest musicians working in this country. Mei Yau promised to post him a copy of our new EP, and we still haven't got round to doing that. Maybe having that promise in print will spur us to action.

TAF: I love yr blog, but even the casual observer can see that yr completely obsessed with food. Is this a shared, band obsession, or is one of you the 'feeder'?

MY: I'm probably the one who's most passionate about food in the band, having grown up in very food-oriented family, but I definitely can't match Chris in terms of the sheer amount or speed of eating. We were all very impressed by a recent visit to the New World restaurant in Chinatown and I totally recommend it – they still serve dim sum in the traditional way from a fleet of trolleys circulating the room.

TAF: Ignorant folk sometimes accuse music that's predominantly made with electronic instruments as being unemotional. What's yr view on the matter?

C: People always say this as if it's automatically a bad thing, but what is



so great about electronic instruments is their versatility. The same sort of synths can be used to create either deliberately cold and "unemotional" music (such as John Foxx's *Metamatics* album or R.L. Crutchfield's *Dark Day*), or warm and emotive music like Animal Collective. We love guitars and traditional instruments too, but it seems a bit stupid to limit yourself to them just for principal's sake.
T: Over the last few years I've become increasingly synth-oriented. You can get so much warmth and texture from electronic instruments. It's strange – if I listen to a great synth-heavy record like something by Harmonia or Kraftwerk, then almost any more guitary album will seem lacking in immediate comparison.
MY: I think traditional instruments do literally resonate with and through the player and it's easy for people to see the effects of that – people can tell whether it's in a heartbreaking or half-arsed performance – but it takes a different and perhaps rarer skill to wring the same resonance from something made of circuit boards.

TAF: What have been the highlights so far? (Apart from Sean O'Hagan saying lovely things...)

C: Our high points thus far have probably been releasing our first EP, and finding fans in all sorts of unexpected places like Indonesia and Mexico.

TAF: Yr playing at the rather lovely Indietracks festival later this month. Who are you most looking forward to seeing play?

T: I'm going to be playing keyboards for the magical Chinese pop group The Marshmallow Kisses, which I'm excited and nervous about, as we haven't actually had a single rehearsal yet. In fact, I've never even met half of the group. Apart from that, I really can't wait to see Teenage Fanclub.
C: There are too many good bands playing to mention them all here, but I'm especially looking forward to catching some of the foreign bands who one doesn't often have a chance to see, such as Fitness Forever from Italy and Modular from Argentina.

TAF: What are you into at the moment?

C: We're slowly but surely working up a store of new material that will hopefully one day provide the basis for an amazing album. When not making music (or dining) we spend a lot of our time seeking out fabulous and unusual films to watch. Classic melodramas directed by Douglas Sirk, or starring Joan Crawford and Gene Tierney have been a particular obsession for me recently, and we can but hope that some of their wonderful influence may have seeped into our music somehow.
T: At the moment I'm into gardening. We're trying to transform our back garden from a weed-infested anthill into a place of baroque wonder. We've planted lettuce seeds and are about to buy a 'weed wand', which is in effect a flame-thrower.
MY: I'm spending the summer writing a lengthy librarianship thesis, which sadly doesn't leave me much time for anything else. The whole experience brings to mind the words of François Truffaut: "When I begin a film, I want to make a great film. Halfway through, I just hope to finish the film."

TAF: It's weird that you mention film being a shared enthusiasm, as I can totally imagine Hong Kong in the 60s producing music to go with film. In a dream world, who would you work with?

C: Unfortunately they don't make films like the ones I mentioned anymore, but it is still a dream of ours to branch into that world. Our brief experience of working on a forthcoming video for our song "Footsteps" with the Italian director Claudio Napoli was amazing. If we had to pick our dream film to score, it would probably be something moody and sensual starring Tony Leung or Isabelle Huppert. Or both of them together, ideally.
MY: We did actually compose a little something for an imaginary film called "King of Chinatown" which charts the epic rise and fall of an immigrant in the Chinese underworld. It's a homage to all those dodgy pirate videos from Hong Kong that my parents used to make me watch when I was a kid.

TAF: A silly question to finish: tell us a secret about Hong Kong in the 60s...

C: We once went on a freezing, raindrenched, three-hour cliff-top walk trying to find a monkey sanctuary in Cornwall. The experience nearly killed us all.
T: And that's where our version of Floater Coffee was born, but that's a different and more vulgar anecdote.

www.myspace.com/hongkonginthe60s

The Lucksmiths

Words: Anastasia Cohen Photos: Pavla Kopecna

Just prior to embarking on their European and Australian tour, the lovely Lucksmiths have announced their breakup after sixteen years of making perfect pop tunes. Nonetheless, they have managed to play two absolutely wonderful gigs in London: a fantastic farewell show at The Scala (complete with party poppers and all), and a smaller, more intimate gig at The Luminaire the night before. We were very excited to ask them a few questions prior to their penultimate London gig!

TAF: Hello there! It goes without saying that it is rather difficult to say 'goodbye' to one of the sweetest indiepop bands out there. The announcement of your break-up must have broken thousands and thousands of pop hearts! How do you feel about it? Has the band accomplished everything it aspired to in the past decade and a half?

Tali: Ah well, you know, it's not good that people are sad - but it's been actually interesting; we've had many responses to the break-ups. Most of the responses online and in-person have just been very thankful for making the music and that's just an interesting thing to ever see as a musician. So it's been sad, but it's also been a bit of a celebration, you know. It's taken this big chunk of our lives - my entire life, basically!

TAF: So you feel like you've accomplished everything you wanted to, in the past sixteen years?

T: Considering we had absolutely no forward thinking as to what we've wanted to achieve - YES! We have achieved absolutely EVERYTHING. A big tick!

TAF: Now that the Lucksmiths tale is coming to an end, what is in store for each of you? Are there any future projects (musical or otherwise) that you're looking forward to?

Louis: We're all still doing other stuff: Marty's got solo stuff, I've got my band and I also play in another band with Marty called Anthony Atkinson. And Marty and I also have another side project which has been on hold for a couple of years. Tali's got The Guild League, and then I guess we're all doing other stuff as well. Marty's being a dad, Tali's teaching...

T: Yeah! We're all busy with our already busy lives!

TAF: Lucksmiths songs paint wonderful portraits of Australia, which for someone who has never been there before seem very romanticized. There are many geographic and weather related themes. Is there a secret passion hidden behind all of this?

T: It's interesting, I think if you were a purely Lucksmiths fan and that's what you thought Australia was like, you would only think of suburbs of Melbourne. I think that's largely a reflection of where we live. And weather's a big thing there, it changes constantly, passing all four seasons in one day...

TAF: More so than England?

Polaroids taken behind The Luminaire, Wed 8th July 2009

T: Well maybe not so...

L: It's less stable!

T: Well today was a good example of that. And that's what Melbourne's like! You've got to dress in layers: T-shirt with coat on top!

TAF: Any funny rumours you would like to spread about yourselves?

T: Yeah! Let's make some up. I'm actually dead. I'm just an actor that these guys got for the tour.

TAF: Are you actually Michael Jackson?

T: I very well could be, you know!

TAF: As you're travelling around Europe and Australia on your farewell tour, what is playing on your mixtapes/CD players/iPods/heads?

T: We all have iPods, but we haven't had actual CDs for a while, so whilst we're traveling around Scandinavia and Germany, we've got Gary with his mixes. There's this song that just keeps following us around - what's its name?

L: Oh, I don't know, I'm really struggling!

T: Hmm, well last time we were in Europe, literally every one in five people would be singing that Peter, Bjorn & John song, and annoyingly we started as well! Actually, I used to do that with the kids at school where I teach - they would play 'Young Folks' with marimbas and percussion. It was lovely. Then they would come up to me and try to whistle the song, without actually making any sounds! It's hilarious.

T: But back on the subject, we've been listening to a lot of 60s music.

L: Yes, there's a really good cover of 'My Boyfriend's Back' by The Angels.

T: And on the plane on the way here, we were listening to Midstate Orange's *Odds* - the most recent album. And in the car in Spain we were listening to some early Elvis!

L: And The Ramones!

T: Yeah, and The Ramones. And The Guild League. Actually, we basically just like listening to ourselves!

TAF: So have you been up-to-date with some of the newest indiepop bands? Are there any recent favourites?

T: We saw Strawberry Fair, who we played with recently. And we liked a band called Charades, who played with us at the Faraday Festival.

L: There were Loch Ness Mouse in Oslo. They were amazing, because they changed their style completely! It was more like soul-jazz. So different and really impressive. Sounded like Steely Dan trying to play prog-rock.

T: Not exactly my cup of tea, but very interesting to watch.

TAF: During your sixteen year career, you must've experienced some strange things. What is the weirdest gig or venue you've played?

T: Oof, there's a lot.

L: Well we played at a venue in Spain, which was owned by the guy in the other band - a very indiepop kind of band. But, inexplicably, it turns out that this guy also runs a venue called 'Pussywagon'! I can only put it down to a failure of language translation that a completely innocent indiepop guy runs a place like that. But then again, they sang in Spanish, so for all I know they could have been shouting obscenities. So, on the other hand, it's entirely possible!

T: We've also played in this very tiny venue, before Louis joined. It was literally a market with all three of us with our gear standing on two packing crates, playing mostly background music!

TAF: Any particularly strange fans?

T: Actually, we just saw a friend Martin in Spain. As of now, he has seen us in seven different countries - but he's also a mate and a great guy. But it's quite nice that he can say 'Let's drop everything and fly around the world following Lucksmiths!'. It's great.

L: And then there was the time we were at a diner in California after a show, and this man has made a list of things such as : 'Number one: you suck, number two: your band sucks, etc...' He handed this piece of paper to our waitress to give to us, then left. So the waitress was really excited - she thought it was a nice note and handed it to us. She came back a little later and asked us 'So, was the note cute, how is it?'. We showed it to her, and she was horrified to have been the messenger for such a thing!

TAF: Do you have any surprises planned for the fans during your tour?

T: Other than the robot elephant? No, nothing else...There are some songs we perform that we haven't played in a long time, and we've been playing longer sets. But other than that, it's still the same ROCKING SHOW that you've come to expect. Sixteen years of rock'n'roll in the making!

TAF: How has the tour been so far? What are the fans' reactions like?

T: The fans have been great. Last night, in Madrid, for example, we played in this tiny room at this sit down show, where you could hardly see the audience. After we played the encore, it was really lovely - they've put the lights up, the fans stood up, and it was amazing and crazy! Pretty much everywhere we've been it's been lovely. People have been saying some nice stuff and it's been a real celebration.

TAF: What will be the LAST EVER live song that you are going to play at the farewell gig in Melbourne?

T: Good question! There's going to be a lot of contemplation about this. Marty does the set list - he loves making lists - and I'm sure he already has made a list about possible last ever songs, and a list of possible last ever encore songs. He probably has lists of these lists! I'm sure each one of us has different ideas. I don't know, I don't know. 'Stayaway Stars' is a pretty good one. But we'll let the listmaker decide.

TAF: Something depressing to leave the fans crying?

T: No no! Definitely nothing too sad.

TAF: Well, we will find out soon enough!

T: Certainly, and a friend of ours is going to film it. So expect a documentary eventually - no time soon though!

www.thelucksmiths.com.au

CAMERA OBSCURA

Words: Rory Mackie Photos: Ren Rox Styling: Lily Lam Hair: Sarah Palmer, Make-up: Sofia Bermudez

Camera Obscura formed in 1996. Initially purveyors of gentle indiepop, they have over the intervening years, become one of the very finest exponents *of British pop.*

In parallel with fellow Glaswegians Belle and Sebastian the band have left behind the introspective musings of their early years for a fuller, more confident sound. But whilst Stuart Murdoch and company may have lost a little of what made them special with the transition, Camera Obscura have gone from strength to strength, breaking out of the indie ghetto with the nigh on perfect pop single, 'Lloyd, I'm Ready To Be Heartbroken' in 2006 and creating a joyful noise comprised of equal parts Motown, Northern Soul and 60s girl groups on subsequent LP *Let's Get Out Of This Country*.

Happily the band's latest album *My Maudlin Career* sees them remain largely faithful to this blueprint, and in lead single 'French Navy' they've produced another slice of sublime sunshine pop, as likely to break hearts and fill dance floors as anything they've come up with to date.

The fulcrum and beating heart of the band is lead singer and chief songwriter Traceyanne Campbell, possessed of a voice rich both in world-weary experience, and the kind of wistful longing that can't help but evoke a certain kind of innocence. It's genuinely startling this voice, an utterly unique thing amongst the identikit indie-landfill crooners and 'vocally challenged' 80s revivalists. Camera Obscura's keyboard player Carey Lander has even gone as far as to suggest that while the rest of the group, "know the band is about Traceyanne's voice - she doesn't."

Campbell has been quoted as saying that she never actually felt like a singer until quite recently. The departure of co-founder John Henderson (around the time of the writing of *Let's Get Of This Country*) forced a band reshuffle, leading to Traceyanne taking on sole singing duties. Subsequent album sessions with producer Jari Haapalainen (The Concretes, Peter Bjorn & John) saw her finally coming to terms with the role: "Jari helped me recognize that it could be much more satisfying than I even thought it could be to sing. I guess he helped build my confidence and helped me understand that I could still be good and have something special without being Whitney Houston."

Lyrically Campbell is famed for her honesty, for tales of heartache that seem so *real*, so deeply personal, that one wonders if there is any disconnect going on at all. However, taking a break from changing in and out of posh frocks for the photo shoot that yielded the pictures that accompany this article; ("no-one's ever actually brought us stuff to try on before!"), Campbell sits down with a cup of Earl Grey keen to dispel any notion that she merely leafs through her diary for the juicy bits. "I've admitted that at times I've been brutal and frank when writing the lyrics but the songs are never going to be totally autobiographical. There would be nothing artistic about that. And I don't really find myself discussing the lyrics that much. I'm more into people taking from them what they want or need."

Amen to that. Camera Obscura have never been in finer voice. My Maudlin Career is one of the finest records of the year and Traceyanne Campbell is fast on her way to achieving national treasure status.

www.camera-obscura.net

C.O. CHRONOLOGY

1996: **Camera Obscura founded in Glasgow by Traceyanne Cambell, John Henderson and Gavin Dunbar.**

1998**: The band release singles; 'Park and Ride' and 'Your Sound'**

1999**: *Rare UK Bird* EP released.**

2000**: Lee Thompson joins the band as drummer.**

2001**: Lindsay Boyd joins as keyboard player and Kenny McKeeve as guitarist. Debut LP *Biggest Bluest Hi-Fi* released and produced by Stuart Murdoch. Single 'Eighties Fan' goes on to be John Peel's favourite, hitting number seven in that year's Festive Fifty.**

2002**: Nigel Baile joins as trumpeter. Carey Lander replaces Boyd. First John Peel session.**

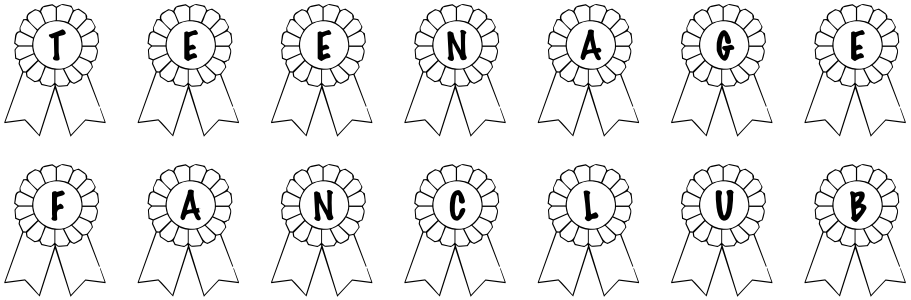
2003**: Second LP *Underacheivers Please Try Harder* released. First US tour. John Henderson leaves band.**

2004**: 'I Love My Jean' and 'Red, Red Rose' are recorded, following their third John Peel session (in which Peel had asked them to put these poems by Robert Burns to music.)**

2005**: Band decamp to Sweden to work on next LP with producer Jari Haapalainen.**

2006**: LP *Let's Get Out Of This Country* released. Single 'Lloyd, I'm Ready To Be Heartbroken' becomes a huge crossover hit.**

2009**: Camera Obscura sign to 4AD and release LP *My Maudlin Career*. Nigel Baile retires from working with the band full-time.**



Words: Erik Sandberg

The first time I was introduced to Gerry I had no idea he was in Teenage Fanclub; I think it was about four years ago when I went along to see Vic Godard play at a rugby club with Bricolage. It kind of sums him up really: he's a quiet, softly spoken and unassuming gent. His band's not too shady either. I caught up with him to talk about his first ever headline slot at a festival, The Boyhairdressers and signing on.

TAF: Can you talk to me a bit about Pema Recordings? Is the new TF album coming out on that label? What were the benefits of self-releasing your own music?

Gerry: Pema is just the name on the label for our own releases; it's not a record company as such. We have a distribution deal with PIAS, and in the US we release on Merge. Our forthcoming LP *Shadows* will be on Pema. The main benefit in self-release is obviously in the amount of control you have in your own affairs. No-one is making decisions on your behalf, you're not waiting for the record company executives to meet and count the beans before telling you what's going to happen next in your life. With the last record, we decided to do an eight week tour of Europe, we decided to play in Italy for the first time, we decided to do a joint tour with The Go-Betweens in Spain. All great things which probably wouldn't have happened had we still been with Sony. Someone would have said no. Sometimes you have a strong instinct about what you should do, which may not make any sense in the boardroom or on the conference call, but which may result in a stronger sense of purpose, which is an important commodity for a group.

TAF: Word has it you're doing a solo album with Geographic, have any of the other TF members been involved? You also play in National Park and The Pastels, has it been more relaxing working on other writers material and playing in different bands?

G: Yeah, I've recorded a bunch of backing tracks with Bob Kildea, Tom Crossley, Dave McGowan, Brendan O'Hare. Dave currently plays with Teenage Fanclub, and Brendan was our drummer in the first phase ('89-'94). Bob's in Belle & Sebastian, Tom's in International Airport and The Pastels. It's been great to work with them. I still have a lot to do on the LP, but it's been a lot of fun, an enjoyable experience. In Teenage Fanclub, I'm just a passenger when it comes to the nuts and bolts of administration, so this project has been a good learning curve for me; I have to pick up the phone, I have to book studios, talk to people, deal with lawyers, accountants, money. This stuff doesn't really come naturally to me so it's been interesting to force myself out of the comfort zone and deal with what is, effectively, complete responsibility.

In contrast, I really enjoy playing in other people's groups, it's always more fun to be part of the band when you don't have to worry about singing and playing at the same time. I do think it's beneficial for musicians to branch out and interact with other musicians mainly because it teaches you how to adapt, how to communicate in a different musical dialect (hope that doesn't sound too derek smalls!). Recently, I've worked with people like The Pastels, Tenniscoats, Alasdair Roberts, National Park. They all approach their music very differently. I've learned a lot from each of them.

TAF: You've recently been announced as the Indietracks headliner. Have you been before and are you looking forward to it?

G: No, I've never been before, never been to an exclusively indie festival before, but I'm looking forward to being part of it, looking forward to checking out some of the groups. It looks like a nice location, too. This is the first time we've ever headlined a festival, so that should be pretty weird.

TAF: How long was it before you actually made a living from being in a band? I recently interviewed the head of PIAS and he claimed ten years!

G: In my life I've only worked for an impressive three months, so in effect, I've always been able to get by, but I suppose it all depends on what you class as 'making a living'. For the first couple of years we were on a Tory initiative called the Enterprise Allowance Scheme where, if you started your own business, you received £20 on top of your dole money. You make ends meet, you get by, no-one I knew ever had any money so you never felt as if you were poor. We signed to Creation in 1991, and that's when we were first able to pay ourselves a wage. I can't remember how much, but it was enough to be able to pay rent, buy food, go out, buy records, maybe even buy clothes - it was a great feeling! We signed a couple of decent publishing deals in the 90s and that provided us with financial security for a good few years. We've never been greedy, we live pretty simple lives, we paid ourselves enough to have a decent standard of living, but not enough for a coke habit. I'd say it took us about five years to get to the stage where we knew we could survive.

TAF: Did you enjoy your spell on Creation? How was it to work with Alan McGee?

G: Looking back, yeah, I really enjoyed it. It was an exciting period for us and, I suppose, an exciting period for Creation. I had been a big fan of Creation records when I was a student, I really loved Felt, very early Primal Scream, The Loft, Weather

Prophets and even today I can't quite believe I was on the same label as them. The Creation I encountered wasn't bohemian or enigmatic, introspective or melancholic. Everyone seemed to be on something, it was full-on, cranked-up, on the verge, slightly paranoid. Sometimes the madness at Creation freaked me out, but I felt safe in the knowledge that most of them were from Glasgow, and that they were all really decent people at heart - but just sliding out of control sometimes. Anything was possible for Alan McGee at that time; he was always ready to have a go, take on the established music industry, challenge the conventions. He was extremely driven, fearless, and I think he instilled some of that enthusiasm and drive in the people he employed and some of the groups he signed. Being on Creation in the early '90s made you feel as if you were a part of a society, a subculture. It certainly wasn't just a record company. I didn't realise that at the time.

TAF: I'd like to know what bands you're listening to just now. Are there any local bands you're digging? What depth of knowledge do you have on the local 'scene'?

G: I have to say that I'm more attracted to old stuff. I've always liked music from the '60s and I'm still discovering amazing music from way back then.

I really don't have a deep knowledge of what's happening in Glasgow at the moment. I really like Remember Remember. I think Bricolage have a good sound, as do your band, Wake The President. I like what I've heard by the Phantom Band. At the moment, I'm listening to things like Virgin Insanity, David Kilgour's solo stuff, Can, Mystic Chords of Memory, The Fugs, Eddie Marcon.

TAF: There seems to be a great American influence on TF's sound, what bands influenced you and why? Any lyricists in particular?

G: Our main American influences were people like The Byrds, Love, The Left-Banke, Buffalo Springfield, The Velvet Underground, Stooges, Modern Lovers, Television, Sonic Youth, Dinosaur; the stuff that was being played at Splash One in the mid-80s became a blueprint for a generation of groups in the Glasgow area. We've always listened to all sorts of music from America: soul, garage, psyche, jazz, country, folk, hip-hop etc. There are lots of great American records in houses and flats in Glasgow, lots of great collectors, some great DJs like Andrew Symington. Listening to these sounds in aggressive industrial towns in Lanarkshire offered some hope that there was something better than what you had to deal with on a day to day level. I grew up next to Ravenscraig steelworks, on the outskirts of Motherwell, so the last thing I wanted to hear was industrial music, noise, anger. I wanted to hear something sweet and harmonious, something beautiful, something optimistic.

I love Jonathan Richman as a lyricist, I love Elliott Smith, Bill Callahan, Thurston Moore, but I'm the type of person who's drawn more to the beat and the melody of a song than to the lyricism. I guess I listen to the rhythm of the words more than the meaning of the words.

TAF: I'm a big Joe Orton fan Gerry,

could you tell me a bit about The Boy Hairdressers, were you involved with that group at all?

G: No, I wasn't involved with The Boy Hairdressers at all, but I saw them play four or five times. They were excellent, by far the best group in Glasgow at that time, I was a big fan. The group was Norman, Raymond, Joe McAlinden, Jim Lambie, and a series of drummers: Francis Macdonald, Paul Quinn, Stevie Gray. They were cool and subtle, they weren't trying too hard, and, for me, that's what set them apart. They had great tunes as well. They released one 12" on 53rd & 3rd then they were gone. Half of the songs on the first Teenage Fanclub LP are Boy Hairdressers songs. I couldn't believe it when I was asked to be in Norman and Raymond's new group!

www.teenagefanclub.com

AMELIA FLETCHER

Words: Rory Mackie Photos: Pavla Kopecna

From Talulah Gosh to Tender Trap, Amelia Fletcher has been right at the heart of indiepop since its inception. An influential and inspirational figure to many, she also oversaw Heavenly and Marine Research, creating classic LPs along the way. Now a mother of two (with fellow Heavenly, Marine Research and Tender Trap band-mate Rob Pursey) and chief economist at the office of fair trading, she somehow found time in her busy day to talk to TWEE...

TAF: Let's start with Talulah Gosh, how did that come about? Was there a grand plan or was it a happy accident?

Amelia: It was an accident, not always a happy one but an accident nonetheless. Although it did come from a desire I'd had to start a band. I was very influenced by things like Marine Girls, Dolly Mixture, even Banarama and sixties girl-groups and had wanted to start a band like that. Then I met Liz, completely by accident at a gig and rushed over to her because she was wearing a Pastels badge..

TAF: Ah, I'd always wondered whether that was an apochrycal story or not. This was at a gig in Oxford right?

A: Right. And you, really, really didn't see many Pastels badges at gigs in Oxford! So I asked her if she played anything and whether she'd be interested in being in a band. And she said she didn't play anything but was willing to learn and would be up for going for it. She also said she had a boyfriend, Greg, who had a guitar and who could teach her. That turned out to be Gregory Webster from The Razorcuts..

TAF: And the name? Is it actually true that it was from an NME headline about Claire Grogan?

A: Well I think so, in my memory it was the stage name that she (Claire Grogan) was planning to use if she ever became a proper film star, but I also think it was Gregory Webster's idea that we use that name, and when I spoke to him about it recently he denied it completely. So in honesty I don't know - the people most likely to know are me and Gregory and we've forgotten completely.

TAF: And you then went on to release a stream of classic singles. Talulah Gosh ended up being hugely influential - was there any sense of that at the time?

A: No not at all! If anything I always felt like we weren't good enough - I mean I knew we had this kind of....spirit, and I understood why people where excited by that and I think that when we were good we could be really good. But most of the time it just felt like we didn't really know what we were doing - just completely random. But maybe that's the best way. Our first proper single 'Beatnik Boy' was a case in point. Greg had taught Liz literally three chords and she wrote the song from those. Completely self-taught songwriting, to the point that it was called 'Beatnik Boy' because Liz thought that it meant Beatles fan, Greg being a huge Beatles fan and the song being about him.

TAF: Talulah Gosh had a relatively short career was it a messy break-up?

A: No not really, I don't think it's fair to say that. What happened was we ended up playing music that I wasn't quite as keen on. We ended up being quite loud and thrashy and while that was great to a certain extent it wasn't what I had envisaged for the band. Our earliest singles were closer to what I'd imagined we'd sound like and towards the end we'd veered away from that. Also I think we'd become as successful as we were ever going to be and it seemed like a good place to end it. The only messy thing was I told others that the band was stopping before I told the rest of the

Rory interviewing Amelia at her lovely garden in London, Fri 3rd July 2009

band. But in general everyone was fine with it. Hmmm...maybe my brother was cross for a while....

TAF: And from the ashes came Heavenly. It was a pretty similar line-up so how did the two bands differ?

A: At that time Indie music was incredibly unpopular. House Music was really king and what “young people” were mainly into. After the break up of Talulah Gosh I even tried to make that kind of music myself, even though I didn't really like it.

TAF: That was your solo single?

A: Yeah, my attempt to be Yazz, if you remember her. And it was a disaster really. I learned that it's always pretty terrible if you attempt to make music that you don't enjoy yourself. So Heavenly was a reaction against all of that really. It was "this is who we are - if you don't like it tough." I'd always wanted to be in an all-girl band, I've never quite succeeded, and Heavenly was an attempt to be as girl-influenced as possible. Even the name was intended to provoke.

TAF: Then came *Heavenly vs Satan*, the masterpiece. What was the writing process for that album?

A: Well in Talulah Gosh everything had been very democratic. The big idea with Heavenly was that I was going to be a bit more of a dictator. It didn't end up like that of course, but I ended up writing all the songs and the words, so in that respect at least I was quite dictatorial I guess. I'm not sure exactly what the mechanics of me writing were, probably just sitting down with a guitar. I think the thing with early Heavenly was that it was us trying to write girl-group type songs and not quite being able to do it really. And actually that lasted throughout. We had all these influences, which we tried to emulate, but somehow we always ended up sounding like ourselves as well.

TAF: Then came *Le Jardin de Heavenly* which was put out in the States by K records, Calvin eventually singing a bit on some Heavenly records...

A: We were all big Beat Happening fans already. In fact we found out that they'd wanted to come and play with Talulah Gosh previously but we'd never been told about it, annoyingly! So it was great to work with him. I remember he could never pronounce the name of the album though. Americans seem sometimes to have a problem with French as Spanish is such a huge thing there - so he'd say' 'Lay Hardine day Heavenly' I remember the recording of both those albums as being really smooth, quick and easy. I seem to remember we were always a lot more fixated on the sleeve artwork than actually the recording process.

TAF: How about the last two albums, *The Rise And Fall of Heavenly* and *Operation Heavenly*? What was the thinking behind them?

A: Well The Rise And Fall pretty much coincided with our discovery of Riot Grrrl, and a lot of the songs are therefore a bit cynical lyrically and experimental musically – while as usual maintaining the Heavenly pop aesthetic. I actually think we got this really right on the singles PUNK Girl and Atta Girl, but we didn’t get it quite so right on the album. I think that’s probably our least good album, even though there are some good things on there.

Operation Heavenly was much more inspired by Britpop, and actually I still really like it. I think we had actually kind of figured out what we wanted to achieve and how to achieve it, for pretty much the first time. I’m not sure the indie afficionados like this one so much though.

TAF: How was it working with K in respect to working with Sarah? They're both such revered labels in the 'indiepop world'.

A: I guess K were more influenced by folk and punk even, so there was a different aesthetic there. Sarah were more indie I suppose, and Matt was very into things like trains and bus shelters, which Calvin was certainly not! But they were both run by one male and one female which I think was important, and they were both great really.

TAF: It's really hard to ask about this, and don't answer if you don't want to, but your brother and bandmate Matthew...

A: Yes. Ummm just before the release of *Operation Heavenly* Matthew killed himself. I don't really know what you want to know, but I'm happy to talk about it.

TAF: I just wondered how you went, from what must have been such a devastating loss, to starting again with Marine Research?

A: I wasn't originally going to at all, after Matthew died it just seemed... but then Rob (Pursey) and Cathy (Rogers) who had both been in Heavenly took me out to lunch and said it was silly and that they missed being in a band and although I really wasn't sure, I did say "yes" but thought we should do something a bit different. I was very into Stereolab and Broadcast at that point and thought that we should do something a bit more in that vein, and so we decided to do that. In the beginning we were called Marine Salvage and Research Ltd, a terrible name - it was meant to depict that almost industrial thing. In the end however our huge love of pop and harmony mean that it ended up sounding more like Heavenly anyway. Marine Research actually did fairly well, they where right to make me do it. It was fun...

TAF: And then Tender Trap..

A: Marine Research ended rather messily, but Rob and me and DJ (Downfall) the drummer set up Tender Trap. The idea was that we didn't want to have a drum kit, because they were a pain to carry around, so we were going to do all that electronically and we didn't want to have any middle eights, because, I don't know, they were too prog-rock or something. So we were going to go electronic with no middle eights, that was our aim, which is not particularly artistically admirable or interesting. The first LP was recorded at home, which was the first time we'd tried that, actually in my parent's basement. Quite a lot of the mixing was done by their cat, who would walk along the mixing board and change the settings. Sometimes we'd go; 'Hmmm, that actually sounds better!"

TAF: Did you give him a credit on the LP sleeve?

A: We might have done, he was called Wokingham and it did say something about Wokingham on the album, I think we may have done. Gradually we decided that we liked real drums better than electronics and gradually we decided that, actually, we did like middle eights. Then, latterly, we realised we missed fuzzy guitars as well and it's all gone a bit back to where we started.

TAF: And you're playing gigs again? You took a bit of a break for a while there..

A: A huge lull of about three years, in fact, which wasn't for any reason other than the fact that we had a second child and thought,' Aaah, we can't do all of this - band, job and two children - it's impossible!' But now she's a little older it suddenly seems possible again. We have two new members as well; Elizabeth Darlin' from Allo Darlin' and Katrina Dixon who has played with loads of bands. It's really fantastic having them in the band and making a bit more of a racket with proper drums and fuzzy-guitars. We're really getting into writing and recording again, so the near future is a single and an album. Everything is pretty much ready, so hopefully the single will come out in the next two or three weeks, although we haven't got anything like a release date, that would be much too professional!

TAF: For which we're very glad. What sort of things are you listening to at the moment? Any new bands?

A: I'm looking forward to seeing Lucky Soul at Indietracks, although the last time I saw them they said they were going a bit more folk/country, so I don't know if I'll be as keen. I really like Betty and the Werewolves and I really like Shrag.I think their album is fantastic. We played with Shrag a couple of times because we really wanted to see them and that's the only way we get to see anyone these days, by playing with them!

www.myspace.com/tendertrap

Margarita
Cupcakes
CUPCAKES:
first batch
¼ cup fresh lime juice
1½ teaspoons grated lime zest
1 cup soya milk or rice milk
¼ cup canola oil
2 tablespoons tequila!
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
second batch
¾ cup granulated sugar
1⅓ cups flour
¼ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
1/ preheat oven to 180°C, line muffin pan w/cupcake liners
2/ beat together the first batch of ingredients in a bowl
3/ sift in the second batch and mix until smooth
4/ fill liners three-quarters of the way full
5/ bake 20 to 22 minutes (no peeking in the oven door!)
6/ once fully baked, transfer cupcakes to a cooling rack and make sure they cool completely before frosting!
HOLA!
TWEE TEQUILA
ICING:
½ cup softened margarine
1 tablespoon soya milk or rice milk
3 tablespoons lime juice
1 tablespoon tequila!
a tiny tiny drop of green food colouring
2 cups icing sugar
⅛ teaspoon coarse salt
1/ fluff margarine with a fork
2/ stir in soya milk, lime juice, tequila & food colouring
3/ sift in icing sugar & blend till creamy & smooth
4/ spread onto cupcakes or refrigerate till ready to use!
¡fiesta!

Label of Love

No. 2 : Sarah Records

Words : Rory Mackie

Of all record labels in all the world, none sums up the spirit of indiepop more than Sarah. Founded by Clare Wadd and Matt Haynes in 1987 the label started with a bang, releasing the Sea Urchins classic 'Pristine Christine', and went on to put out records by The Field Mice, Heavenly and The Orchids, among others. Uncompromisingly DIY and fiercely anti-corporate, Sarah served as both blueprint and ideal for every indiepop label that followed. Here Clare and Matt kindly answer a few questions for us ...

TAF: Let's start at the beginning; how did you two meet and what led to you setting up the label, Matt you were putting out Are You Scared To Get Happy at the time right?

Clare: Blimey, we are going back! We met in the usual way: I tried to sell Matt a fanzine at a Primal Scream gig, he said no thanks, he'd got one already...I'd moved to Bristol for university a couple of months earlier, & got in touch with Matt & the other fanzine writers there first so I'd hopefully know a couple of people, sent them my fanzine, *Kvatch*, which I'd been doing for a couple of years. Next time we met was because I wanted to ask him for some help with a flexidisc I was doing – my main concern was whether I could carry a thousand home to Yorkshire on the bus from London. It turned out both me and Sha-la-la were doing flexis with The Sea Urchins, & that thankfully we'd picked different songs off the same demo to release. It started from there really, I think Matt ended up fetching my flexis back with his or something, & The Sea Urchins became the obvious first band for Sarah.

Matt: In case anyone's confused, Sha-la-la was a flexidisc-only label, with the flexis being distributed by fanzines (the main ones being *AYSTGH, Baby Honey,* *Simply Thrilled* and *Trout Fishing* in Leytonstone), so that we could press a decent amount (2,500).

TAF: In retrospect it seems like such an exciting time for DIY labels and distribution. Did you feel this at the time?

C: I think it was an exciting time, but that's more obvious in retrospect because back then it was just the way it was. And there was a real community, both in Bristol and nationwide, even though people didn't always form friendships or spend time together. Gigs were so little, you saw the same people the whole time and inevitably spoke & got to know each other a bit. It seemed to be a time when most people you saw at gigs were either in bands or promoting or doing fanzines or trying to form bands or - *something*. For me, it was very much about being part of something, a do-er rather than just an observer. There was very much a can-do attitude, but I think that had to do with many people involved being so young too. When you're nineteen it doesn't occur to you that you can't just set up a record company, even though you know nothing about anything, and haven't got any money; at twenty-nine you'd probably want to do some research first, which would mean you ran your record company the tried and tested way, which takes half the creativity and idiocy out of it. When our distributors asked us to invoice them for our first sales, I went into college and asked the one mature student on my course if he knew what an invoice was... we knew nothing!

M: We also didn't have a phone, which used to annoy our distributor. And though, as Clare says, the gigs were quite small, there was a definite "circuit" that bands used to play, often with the gigs being promoted by people who were writing fanzines or in bands themselves, so it definitely functioned as a mutual support network. And, at the risk of romanticising, I suspect the fact that this was all pre-internet helped - everything was done by letters and actual meetings: if you wanted to see a band and talk to them, you went and slept on someone's floor who lived where they were playing... the role of National Express coaches in the history of indiepop should not be underestimated...

TAF: How difficult was it in the beginning to get established? The 'indie' community was pretty much under the radar when you started, what were the main difficulties?

C: I think we had a real head start because things had already got going by 1987 when we started up. Revolver Distribution was based in Bristol, and when we went and asked them for a manufacturing and distribution deal (meaning they put up the money to press the records) they already knew who Matt was because AYSTGH and Sha-la-la had had press. And they'd already had success with Martin Whitehead and Subway, so it wasn't too much of a punt for them. The first record got Single of the Week, in NME I think, and sold out pretty quickly, then they were willing to invest in the second one, and so on...

M: Probably worth clarifying that though Revolver put up the money, it was a loan - we still had to pay them back if the records didn't sell! And they just paid for the pressing - we stillhad to pay for the recording and everything else. Some of the main problems were caused by our own naivety; we knew nothing about printing, so ended up paying about as much for the centre labels on the first ten singles (colour one side, b/w the other) as to press the actual vinyl! Duh. Also, our first barcode didn't scan because we printed it in red. You learn...

C: We promoted the records through both our fanzines, and the networks we'd built up through the fanzines – writing people letters – and through the press, radio, and the bands did gigs. I think Peel played Pristine Christine four times (he'd previously promoted our fanzines, so we were both in touch with him), Janice Long played it more than once... It was in the days when we still had Sounds as well as NME & Melody Maker. Smash Hits still existed, Record Mirror too, I think, so 4 or 5 weekly papers, all selling substantial numbers of copies. Everything was all about pop and about singles - not necessarily our type of pop, but the throwaway silly weekly press was a much better climate for us than the serious monthly grown-up boys-club album-focussed press (Q, Mojo, Select etc.) that came later, would have been.

M: The downside, of course, was that if you didn't get reviewed in one of those five papers, or played by John Peel, you'd had it - there were no websites or blogs or e-zines or MySpace, no internet radio, no indiepop mailing-lists, no mp3s to swap... all you had was word of mouth, which was people literally writing letters to each other, making each other cassettes, or selling fanzines at gigs...

TAF: Sarah was radical in the way

it was set up and distributed, with a quietly revolutionary spirit. A fact that often got lost in the press which tended to depict the label as apolitical, at a time where having a markedly political outlook was seen as essential. That must have been galling...

C: Yes, it was always very frustrating. I think certain journalists reacted to a very narrow interpretation of C86 – the kind of posh whimsy side – and then that became what defined us too. And the fact that the music often was gentle, sometimes fey, and usually not overtly political (although we're very proud of having released the first anti-poll tax song - 'Defy The Law' by The Orchids), added to that of course.

M: Because a lot of the politics was to do with the label itself, rather than the music, I suppose a journalist wouldn't necessarily pick up on it from hearing one release. That said, when Melody Maker think it's OK to describe Blueboy's 'Clearer' (a song about how homosexuality is still only grudgingly tolerated, even in these supposedly enlightened times) as "a limp-wristed song about being sad", you do wonder why you bother. clearly you can only be political if you shout and bang things.
C: The first Heavenly single was our first record to have a female lead vocal– and it was number 30– but I remember it being reviewed in NME as "yet another twee Sarah record with yet another twee girl singer". We got criticised for putting pictures of girls on record sleeves all the time, when in fact we had a rule that we never did. We got called "girlie" all the time - as an insult, of course, as if there's anything wrong with that. I don't think it had much to do with me being involved, as people seemed confused by that, it was all very much "Matt *&* his girlfriend helping out", which drove me crazy; if people called up (later on, when we had a phone), they'd wait to be passed over to someone who knew what they were talking about if I answered. But, y'know, we were called Sarah, and journalists are busy people with tight deadlines, so of course they go for the obvious...

M: I think we just consoled ourselves with the fact that anyone who equated femaleness with lack of substance clearly had problems that no amount of Talulah Gosh singles could ever solve...

C: I'm not sure that having a markedly political outlook was essential at the time – times were much more political then than they are now, but a lot of our political stance was a response to what we felt a lot of other people were doing wrong, thoughtlessly. Like, not acting as if all women had to offer was decoration (vocal or visual), which was the status quo in the indie-world as much as in the mainstream world. Or people would be vocal about the miners but then overtly capitalist about selling records, as if they couldn't see the link, as if capitalism was bad, and then suddenly good if it was you who was trying to make money.

M: One of the saddest aspects was the lack of real-world politics in most of the indie-scene. People would claim to be feminists, then stick a picture of Audrey Hepburn or a generic sixties chick on the cover of their single or fanzine, or see nothing wrong with shoving the one woman in the band to the front for the photo. Or claim to be anti-capitalist, then make their fans buy their single on two or three different formats...

TAF: You've worked with so many great bands and your discography is second to none. Any favourites?

C: Aw, thank you. We're still both very very proud of the label and its releases, and I'm sure we've both spent 20 years saying we can't choose between the records - we love them all. Which is true. But some are more overlooked than others. It was nice to see The Sweetest Ache getting a mention in The Guardian yesterday. Brighter I still love, and I think they're underrated. It's always hard to disassociate the records from the bands, from the people -especially people who aren't around anymore, from the ease or difficulty of dealing with them, or the recordings, the ones that went over-budget or got recorded twice etc. etc. I still think Sarah 99 is every bit as good as Sarah 1, though, and I think that's pretty important.

M: Slight tangent, but it's amusing how people - both fans and denigrators - tend to decide for themselves what constitutes the "Sarah Sound", and then shut their eyes/ears to anything that doesn't fit the stereotype they've just created. If you see a band getting dismissed/praised as Sarah-esque, it almost certainly means they sound like Brighter or early Field Mice, not Action Painting or Boyracer or The Golden Dawn - which is frustrating, because it means the world at large assumes everything we released was fey and jangly. And I've yet to meet a Field Mice fan who agrees with me that Missing the Moon (sequencers! keyboards! dance music!) was their finest moment. But then the C86 cassette featured Bogshed, Big Flame and Half Man Half Biscuit as well as Primal Scream... and it didn't feature Talulah Gosh... but that's not how History remembers it...

TAF: How do you feel about the recent upsurge in interest in indiepop and the word 'twee' to describe the music?

C: The interest is always good, though I don't think either of us is a fan of nostalgia... and the word twee is weird, because it was always our bugbear. We never really liked the infantalisation side of it anyway, which is what twee really referred to, but now it just seems to be a genre, which I guess is fine. It's hard not to deny it though. But I guess the way twee is now being defined, we were pretty much the home of it.

M: Personally, I can't conceive of "twee" being anything but an insult. I think when it was first used in the current twee-as-fuck incarnation it was supposed to be a humorously ironic two-fingered reclamation... but the humour and the irony somehow got lost along the way, especially in the trip across the Atlantic. I still can't help feeling, though, that, even used non-pejoratively as a genre name, it's going to turn a lot of people off, which seems a bit of a shame.

TAF: Are there any artists that you wanted to work with at the time that didn't quite happen? Who would you like to work with if Sarah existed today?

C: I'm sure there must have been, there's certainly plenty of records that came out around the time we started Sarah that I'd love to have put out – like Jesse Garon and This Poison! and the Clouds and The Pastels. And I'm sure several who aren't Scottish. Talulah Gosh, The Wedding Present, The Shop Assistants, they all inspired us. These days, my wish-list would start with Glasvegas *&* Stars and would include Hidden Cameras, Spearmint, Ballboy, Darren Hayman, Pains of Being Pure At Heart *&* Arcade Fire. It would have been great to have been around for Baxendale too. *&* I'd love to have released Cinerama

.**TAF: Why do you think there was a hostile attitude towards Sarah in the music press, despite pockets of support?**

C: We didn't play the game; we didn't

know there was a game when we started, let alone what it was... I remember Bob Stanley kindly suggesting we could let the press have the records ahead of release so they could review them, and us saying why should journalists get to hear them before the fans, that wouldn't be fair... Us being in Bristol made difference - we didn't know people, didn't see people around, and we went out of our way to be a bit apart. Because we had such a strong conviction we were doing things the right way, we had an equal conviction everyone else was doing things the wrong way, and we weren't afraid to tell them, which didn't make us easy to deal with. I don't think we realised a few pleasantries with a few people gets you a long way, maybe we didn't want to realise that, or maybe it was just that we'd never had jobs or a way to learn that. We were quite young. Later on, when we were more successful, people weren't necessarily keen to meet us or help us out. Jo Whiley interviewed us on Radio 1 in about 1994 when she was quite new there, and I think was genuinely nervous about how aggressive we'd be, because we'd written in to say "why are you playing this shit when you could be playing our records?" or something. Anyone who's met us knows we're really both pretty meek and mild-mannered...And the people who did like us got ribbed for it. It's easy to forget that the offices of the music press were male and macho and kind of nasty. If giving us a good review would get you teased, and you didn't know us or have any reason to stick your neck out for us, why would you bother?

M: We had more than one journalist refuse to review a record because they'd reviewed a previous one - essentially, saying they didn't want to risk being known round the office as "the Sarah fan". But I don't imagine they didn't review Primal Scream because they'd just reviewed The Jesus & Marychain. And obviously some journalists made a career out of reviewing everything Sub Pop ever released. So... male insecurity? Basically, though, journalists were happy slagging us off or ignoring us because they knew they wouldn't bump into us at the next aftershow party.

TAF: Sarah was openly anti-capitalist and deplored the sexism inherent in the music business. Do you think there has been a change (either for better or worse) in the way the industry operates?

C: I think the sexism has generally got better – there are certainly more women in bands and more women writing songs, and with their own bands, and that's great. I won't be satisfied until it's 50 / 50, but it's still a hell of a lot better than it was.

M: Yeah, I think it genuinely wouldn't occur to an 18-year-old woman these days that she couldn't be in a band just because she was a woman, or that she would have to be the singer if she was. I suspect she also wouldn't believe how bad things were just twenty years ago. I think a lot of that's down to the internet and the way that music generally is discussed and exchanged between peers irrespective of gender - as a woman, you no longer have to brave going to a gig on your own, which in the past was pretty much the only way to get involved. "Indie" is also a lot more high-profile - you'd have had to be a pretty weird 14-year-old in 1987 to have been into "alternative" music, but these days all 14-year-olds watch Skins and use MySpace (or whatever's replaced it this week) and all the rest, so I think girls just grow up with the idea of being into non-mainstream music, both passively and actively, in a way they never used to...

C: I think the capitalism has matched the country in general, and got way way worse. I don't know if recent events, this recession and its causes, MPs' expenses, the widening gap between rich and poor, will see any sort of left-wing backlash, but it seems unlikely at the moment, and it's hard to believe we're not going to have a Conservative government this time next year. I think whatever the new model we eventually arrive at for making money out of music is, it seems inevitable it will be more about wider income streams - sponsorship, adverts, merchandise etc., and that will throw writers into bed with business, and will inevitably stifle dissent and difference and overt left-wing political messages. You'll get your big break by being acceptable to big corporations, and where would that have got the Clouds?

M: Although obviously the internet has opened up essentially cost-free channels for people to make their music available, and maybe some artists will realise they can do most of it themselves without ripping anyone off? Pressing 1000 flexidiscs was relatively cheap, but putting a track up for download costs nothing.

TAF: What was the day to day running of the label like?

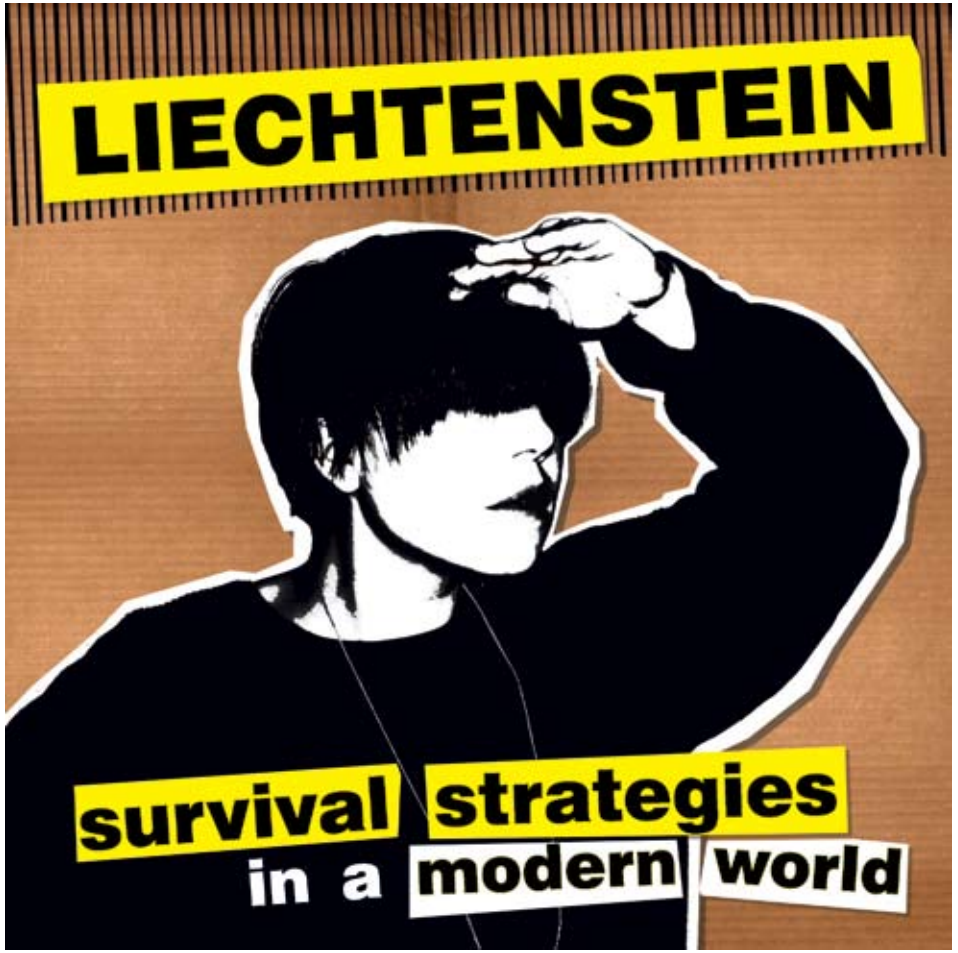
C: It was hard work actually. We did it for eight years, and for about five years we were both full time (the first couple I was finishing my degree, and the last year I also worked at our distributors). We had offices for a while, but worked from home most of the time, 100 hour weeks, and we didn't really do a lot else to be honest. So it was very intense, very insular – and, because we were a couple, it was our whole lives. It was fine because it was generally great fun, and I really wouldn't have missed it for the world - but I wouldn't want to do it again. Now I like having a job I can come home from, though Matt still works for himself producing Smoke.

TAF: What advice would you give to anyone wishing to set up an independent label today?

C: You know, it's 14 years since Sarah stopped, so I don't think I'm remotely qualified to give anyone any advice anymore. The music industry has changed enormously since 1995. I guess the best advice is not to take advice, to do what feels right to you, and give it a go. But we made a lot of quite expensive mistakes doing it that way...

M: Deep breath... I'm not sure it's the right question to be asking. I genuinely can't see why any band just starting out would sign to a small label when they could release their own music directly. And then sign to a big label with all its PR/marketing clout once they're established if they really feel the need. If you're reasonably web-savvy, you can promote yourself just as well as any small record label ever could - you don't even need to hire a recording studio a lot of the time (not that a lot of small labels seem to pay for recording anyway). A lot of the labels that do exist these days seem to be nothing but vanity projects - run by people who just like the idea of running a record label, and literally just press a handful of actual discs. Sarah might not have been the biggest label, but we held ourselves back by being bloody-minded and recalcitrant and refusing to compromise, not by making limited editions that just encourage elitism and snobbery. Mp3s have most of the pop aspects of a 7" (one song, sold cheaply), just none of the elitism.

Album Review



Liechtenstein
Survival Strategies In A Modern World

Here are some of the best things in the world: Girls At Our Best!, Delta 5, early Primitives/Shop Asisstants, *Kitchen Tapes*-era Raincoats, badges, fanzines, vodka, Talulah Gosh *and* Heavenly, most things that Pam Berry and/or Amy Linton have done, Dolly Mixture, The Marine Girls. Now imagine that three young women from Gothenburg, Sweden think that these are some (or most) of the best things in the world too. Imagine that they sing perfect three-part harmonies and wrap them around sparse, cooly beautiful songs that hark back to all of the above. Imagine that they've recorded an album nine songs and 23 minutes long. Imagine that they've released this on their own impossibly cool record label, Fraction Discs. Imagine that previously they've made two of the finest singles you've heard in recent memory and imagine that, rightly, they haven't even included them on this LP. Imagine you've seen them play live a handful of times, each time thinking, "this is perfect", only for them to get better at the next. Done? Well then, you've just Imagined *Survival Strategies In A Modern World* by Liechtenstein and as you've probably already guessed, it's brilliant.

From opening post-punk lullaby 'All At Once' to the ethereal acoustic jangle of closer 'The End' this record barely puts a foot wrong. Its simplicity and its brevity only go to underline how the best music, the best *things*, are those that are unforced, that come naturally and fully formed, and don't stick around long enough to bore. For Liechtentein are a lesson in, not minimalism exactly, but the merit of leaving well alone when the basic ingredients (guitar, bass, drums and those vocal harmonies - *oh! those harmonies!*) are doing such a good job without embellishment. No clutter, no filler, no *fuss*, just nine pop songs exquisitely delivered. Imagine that…

Words by Rory Mackie

Seven Sevens

Seven 7"s we can't get enough of...

Help Stamp Out Lonliness: Pacific Trash Vortex (WIAIWYA 7")
Like a Nico-fronted (early) Electrelane with added P!O!P! 'Pacific Trash Vortex' is all Farfisa, tambourines and, thanks to singer D. Lucille Campbell's extraordinary voice, a hint of smoky Wiemar republic cool. Probably the best song about a sea of floating rubbish ever released. Rory Mackie

The Mayfair Set: Already Warm'/'Desert Fun (Captured Tracks 7")
Ok, so this has been available on import for a while, but the b-side, 'Desert Fun', is one of the best things I've heard this year. Where 'Already Warm', the a-side, has a competent spaced out, Spectorish sound not unlike that of Crystal Stilts, 'Desert Fun' is a warped pop gem from its opening surf guitar riff. It's the kind of song that you finish listening to, pause for a moment and play again. Elaine Tierney

Stereolab: Jump Drive Shut-Out (Duophonic 7")
More unbelievable excellence from Stereolab. This tour-only seven inch is a complete must-have, if you can find it. 'Jump Drive Shut-Out' is an absolute beast, comprising of about seven different ace bits all sewn together by a hypnotic groove and Laetitia Sadier's purring vocals. Staggeringly good. RM

Allo Darlin': 'Henry Rollins Don't Dance' (Weepop 7")
"Baby don't dance" purrs Elizabth Morris (also of Tender Trap) but we disobey her, our feet skipping and bopping as we sing along to "WHen my baby kisses me, it's like honey to a bee." Och, it's a an adorable tweepop number for unashamed romantics. (Though watch out for a rendition of the Grease finale at the end). Pavla Kopecna

Signed Papercuts: Of My Heart/Sound of Silence Pt. 2(Cloudberry 7")
Lovely dreampop straight out of Gothenburg. 'Of My Heart' charmingly hugs your ears with its girl/boy vocals, fast-paced jangly guitars, and a simply perfect outro. The cleverly titled 'Sound of Silence Pt. 2' carries on your shoegazy bedroom dance party - on a slightly more lo-fi side. Time to dig up your rusty Jesus and Mary Chain T-shirt! Anastasia Cohen

Socialist Leisure Party: Turktown Saints/Vulnerable Adults (Cloudberry 7")
Beautiful backing flute in 'Turktown Saints' is a wonderful accompaniment to this catchy, almost psychedelic tune. If Cats On Fire existed in the 80s, I reckon this would be their sound. 'Vulnerable Adults' along with its jangly guitars, gives an odd French quote: 'Je suis Satan' (I think?). Strange but wonderful - but can you expect anything less from these ex-Action Painters?! AC

Komon: 'EBay Watchlist' (Papillonsnoir 7")
Is that a cover of Electrelane's President? No it's not we realise, as soon as the cracking intro ends and the squakish vocals begin. The instrumentals have a much darker feel than the "electrotwee" label attached to Komon suggests, even if she does tour with A Smile And A Ribbon and sings about carboot sales. An interesting attempt to marry twee lyrics with morose electronic melodies. PK

Four x Five

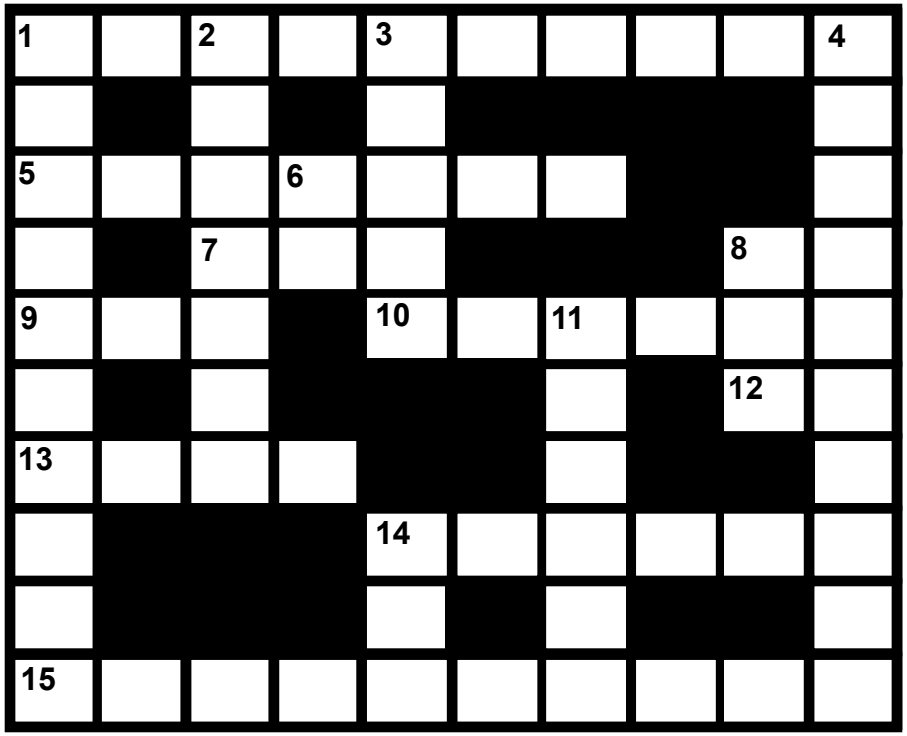
Five songs we'd cross rivers for...

Pavla:
Talulah Gosh: My Best Friend
Heavenly: K-Klass Kisschase
The Sweetest Ache: I Remember Caroline
Sophisticated Boom Boom: The Only One
Girls At Our Best!: Politics!

Jude Georges:
The Triffids: Beautiful Waste
Stockholm Monsters: Everything's Wrong
Stereolab: Jump Drive Shut-Out
This Poison: The Great Divide
The Bobby McGee's: Go Tiger Go

Elaine:
Michel Polnareff: Ta Ta Ta Ta
Let's Wrestle: In Dreams
Veronica Falls: Found Love in a Graveyard
Finally Punk: Coffee Tea and Misery
The Mayfair Set: Desert Fun

Anastasia:
The Lucksmiths: Self-Preservation
Let's Whisper: Hey Sunshine
Plume: Everything I Need
The Airfields: Icing Sugar
Summer Cats: Hey You, It's Me (Oh My)



Pop crossword by Rory Mackie

ACROSS

1. 'The .....' Australian Indiepop band that recently completed their farewell tour of Europe. (10)
5.'The .....' Indiepop band from Los Angeles who released the single 'Cats Of Camelford' on YAY! records in 2008. (7)
7. French dance band consisting of Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel. (3)
8.Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz is also known as; '..-Rock'. (2)
9. Minnesota based 'slowcore' band that released the LP *Things We Lost In The Fire* in 2001. (3)
10. See 14 Across.
12. '.. Rockets' London Indie band that release the single 'Renee Loves Losers' on Ctrl Alt Del Records in September 2009. (1,1)
13. Hip-Hop band from New York that released the LP *Bacdafucup* on Def Jam in 1993. (4)
14. (and 10 across) London band signed to Aphex Twin's Rephlex label that spearheaded the short-lived 'lounge revival' in the mid 90s. (6,6)
15.'The .....' Austalian Indiepop band that released the single '2 Star Motel' on Slumberland Records in 1994. (10)

DOWN

1.'The ....' Californian Indie band whose song 'Oh MJ!' was remixed by Stereolab. (6,4)
2. 'The .....' Japanese Indiepop band signed to Bluebadge. (7)
3. 'The .... Things' New York chamber-pop band that released the LP *Moveable Feast* in 2007 (5)
4. 'The .....' Indiepop band whose song 'What Went Wrong This Time' was included on the 2006 compiliation LP *CD86*.
6. American Hip-Hop artist also known as Clifford Joseph Harris Jr. (1,1)
8. 'Love Is ...' Swedish indiepop band formed by ex members of Girlfrendo. (3)
11. 'Luminous .....' Japanese indiepop band that released the LP *Vivid Short Trip* on Cream Cone Records in 1996. (6)
14. 'The ... Club' Post-Punk/Psychobilly band that released the single 'Sex-Beat' in 1989. (3)

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